



Frequently Asked Questions - Drinking Water Operator Expense Reimbursement Grant – Vouchers

Environmental Assistance Office fact sheet

3/2004

Q: What is the Operator Expense Reimbursement Grant?

A: The Missouri Department of Natural Resources has been awarded more than \$3 million in the form of a Drinking Water Operator Expense Reimbursement Grant. Grant funds will be allocated to public water systems that serve a population of 3,300 persons and less to provide funding for operator training and certification. The department will be using a voucher system to distribute grant funds to eligible public water systems.

Q: What is a voucher?

A: A voucher is the official department-issued form used as payment for drinking water operator training, examinations and certifications.

Q: Why use a voucher system? Why not directly reimburse operators for their costs or enter into a contract with trainers to provide the necessary training?

A: The department determined that using a voucher system will best meet the needs of eligible drinking water systems. Reimbursement of individual operators would add significant cost to the grant administration, resulting in less money available for training and certification. Entering into contracts with training providers would restrict the type of training available to operators and the number of trainers involved in the program. This would negatively impact the current free market system of operator training. By using a voucher system, the department is able to keep the administrative costs comparatively low, while allowing each operator to attend the training of choice.

Q: How will an operator know which public water systems will receive vouchers?

A: A list of the eligible water systems is posted on the following Web site:
www.dnr.mo.gov/oac/optrain.htm.

Q: Can vouchers be used to pay for system repairs or equipment?

A: No. Vouchers can only be used as payment for drinking water training and for costs associated with obtaining and renewing operator certification.

Q: Will any information be sent to the qualifying water systems before the vouchers are issued?

A: Yes. Information packets will be sent to each qualifying water system several weeks before the vouchers will be sent. The packets will contain information about the grant and will explain how the voucher program will work.

Q: Where will information packets and vouchers be sent?

A: The department will mail the information packets and vouchers to the official contact on record for each eligible water system.

Q: Who are the official contacts for these water systems?

A: It depends. For a small town, it is usually the mayor. For other systems, it may be the owner or another designated contact, like the president of a homeowner's association. A list of the official contacts for each qualifying water system will be posted on the following Web site:
www.dnr.mo.gov/oac/oprtrain.htm.

Q: Why are the information packets and the vouchers being sent to the official contacts for the water supply? Why not send them directly to operators?

A: Because the department's operator records are not always up to date, the vouchers must be sent directly to the water systems. They will provide the vouchers to their employees.

Q: Is there any way for the official contact to request that vouchers be sent to someone else?

A: Yes, the department understands that some official contacts may prefer that the vouchers be sent to someone else, for example, the superintendent or chief operator. The information packet will include instructions on how the official contact person can designate an alternate name and address for the vouchers. However, vouchers can only be sent to an employee of the water system.

Q: What do the vouchers look like?

A: The vouchers have two different pieces: a form and stickers. The form will be filled out and signed by the operator and a water system representative. Stickers will represent the money spent on the voucher and will come in a variety of denominations (for example, \$5, \$10, \$20, etc.). The voucher forms and stickers will both be pre-printed with the drinking water system name and number.

Q: What signatures will be required on the voucher?

A: In order to be approved for payment, the operator submitting the voucher and a system representative must sign it. This is to verify that the operator has permission from the drinking water system to use one of their vouchers.

Q: Do you have to be a certified operator to use a voucher?

A: No, you just need to be employed by the water system. Water systems may find the vouchers useful as payment for multi-day training that their employees can take prior to taking a certification examination, and as payment for the examination.

Q: Can the vouchers be used for any training?

A: No. Vouchers can only be used at drinking water training that has been pre-approved by the department and is eligible for vouchers. In addition, the trainer must agree to accept vouchers as payment. The department expects that most training providers will be accepting vouchers as payment.

Q: How will an operator know if a training course will accept vouchers as payment?

A: That information will be included on training announcements on the Operator Certification page of the department Web site and in *The Water and Wastewater Digest*. The department also anticipates that trainers will include that information when advertising a training course.

Q: How long will vouchers be valid?

A: Vouchers will expire approximately three years after they are issued. After the indicated expiration date, those vouchers will no longer be valid.

Q: What happens to the grant money after the vouchers expire?

A: After the vouchers expire, the department will evaluate the success of the voucher program. If it is successful, the department may choose to re-issue more vouchers. If the department determines that certain training and certification needs are still not being met, remaining grant money will be used to address those needs.

Q: Where can I get more details about the vouchers?

A: As the department finalizes the exact procedures, updates will be added to the following Web site: www.dnr.mo.gov/oac/oprtrain.htm.

Additionally, upcoming issues of *The Water and Wastewater Digest* will include more information about the grant program and vouchers.

Additional questions can be e-mailed to opcertgrant@dnr.mo.gov. Questions can also be addressed to the department at 1-800-361-4827.